

CHAPTER II.

GETTING ACQUAINTED.

AS Grandpa Howe afterwards said, he was "rather put to it to know what to say." He was not accustomed to girls. His own family had consisted of five boys, and none of them had been in the habit of crying after they got out of sleeved aprons; at any rate, they had never cried on his neck.

"Hush, dear, hushaby! Your father always was forgetful, but that's no matter," said he, patting Emily on the back as if she were a baby, and had swallowed a button. "No wonder it seems kind of homesick to you, raining so, and the fire all out. Why, that fire has n't been out before—I don't know the time when; but we'll soon have it going again. Why, Charles, what are you thinking about? Lay the kindlings on top, *on top!* do you hear?"

Charles, the "chore-boy," had never been asked before to touch that sacred fire, and was awkward now from sheer embarrassment.

Emily heard her grandmother coming.

"I didn't mean to cry, I won't be silly," said she, springing away from her grandfather, and brushing back her flying, exuberant, unmanageable hair.

"That's right," cried Captain Howe, much relieved. "Let's have a good look at you. Turn round to the lamp. Well, well, you're rather dark for a Howe, and not extra handsome, but I like the looks of you. Come and kiss me again. Now your grandmother, dear."

Madam Howe bore the caress with Christian fortitude, taking it on her cheek as if it had been a blow.

"I suppose you have n't had your supper," said she, before it was fairly over.

"No, grandma, the stage would n't wait," replied the young traveller, feeling very much to blame, she hardly knew why, and moving involuntarily nearer the fire, which was now burning brightly.

It was a very pleasant sitting-room, she could see that; the furniture was half antique, half modern, and everything had a shining look, as if it had been starched and ironed and polished. The andirons were more than a hundred years old, but shone as good as new, brighter than the sun, if anything, for the sun has spots on its surface, and they had none.

"Sit down, my dear," said Captain Howe.

Emily seated herself on the extreme edge of a chair.

"I'll be just as still and proper as I can," thought she, "and only speak when I'm spoken to."

But keeping still was not Emily's talent. She was an active little creature, always in motion, like a lady's ear-ring.

"You found the roads pretty bad, did n't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Were you afraid?"

"No, sir."

"Anybody in the stage with you?"

"Oh, yes, grandpa, the dearest, loveliest girl!" cried Emily, forgetting herself. "Delight Sanborn, — and is n't she a darling?"

"Well, well! Did you find all that out coming five miles? Why, it was so dark you could n't see her face!"

"I saw it while we were waiting at the station, grandpa. She had been shopping at Poonoosac, and when she heard me ask for the Quinnebasset stage she inquired who I was. And only think, grandpa, we used to play together when we were little girls! She remembers ever so much about it, for she's two years older than I. And is n't she a perfect beauty? With so much style, too, and so tall! And ever so sensible."

Emily had delivered herself of this long speech without once thinking of her grandmother, and was abashed when that lady exclaimed, —

"How came Delight Sanborn shopping in Poonoosac such travelling as this? But it's just like her; she's a real hity-tity kind of a girl."

Emily felt as if a wet blanket had been dashed in her face.

"Oh, now, mother, you're rather hard, seems to me. What have you got against Delight?" said Captain Howe.

"Why, I have n't anything against her; who said I had? Only she has had the name, ever since I came here, of being a kind of ringleader among the girls."

"Well, well, I guess she's the brightest of 'em all; leastways, she's the only one that can talk politics. And what if she does curl her hair and fly round some? Did n't you do the same when you were a girl?"

But Madam Howe's trap-door was down. It was n't worth while to answer all father's foolish questions. Moreover, she was busy getting some lovely old-fashioned dishes out of the cupboard, for she saw no object in sending Solomon's little girl to bed hungry.

"Well, what did you and Delight talk about?" pursued grandpa, trotting his foot.

"Oh, lots and lots of things," said Emily, with her eye on her grandmother. "About the folks I was going to see, you know."

"Us, for instance?"

"She said your kitchen girl was a great talker," replied Emily, evasively.

What was the matter now? Grandpa laughed, and grandma turned round to exclaim, —

"What did I just tell you about Delight?"

"Well, well, mother, it was probably one of her jokes. Hester is the smallest talker I ever saw for a woman. Well, what else?"

"She said your boy Charles was a perfect curiosity," replied Emily, choosing her words. "She said he had a very romantic history, and had been terribly abused."

"She told the truth there; I'll indorse every word of it. Charles is a good, honest, likely fellow, and he *has* been terribly abused. Well, what did she say about your grandmother and me?"

Emily fluttered from chair to chair uneasily, but it was useless trying to escape.

"She — she — said you were an old-line Democrat, grandpa, and a hard-shell Baptist; and she said you fell in love with grandma hearing her speak at an evening meeting in Bangor, and married her on the spot."

"Well said!" cried grandpa, laughing heartily, and rubbing his hands. "What think of that, mother?"

Madam Howe blushed a little, said nothing, but did not look displeased.

"He sha'n't ask another question! I don't dare have him," thought Emily. "O grandpa!" said she, "I want to show you Dunie's photograph, — my little sister Dunie's. It's in my waterproof pocket."

She sprang up suddenly, and opening the door in nervous haste, ran against a woman — Hester, no doubt — bringing in a tea-tray.

"Beg pardon, ma'am. I did n't break anything, did I?"

The woman smiled, and pointed to a napkin which had fallen on the floor.

Emily picked it up.

"So sorry you had to get supper for me," said she, for her grandmother's reception had made her very humble.

The woman passed on without a word.

"Cool!" thought Emily, gazing after her in surprise.

Charles looked on from behind the shed door, and smiled as he hung up his leathern apron. Then, without raising his eyes, he walked forward very solemnly to a stand before the stove, which had a green tin lamp on it, and some books.

"I suppose grandma makes him study out here. Delight said she did n't treat him very well," thought Emily, venturing a glance at his face.

It was not at all such a face as she had expected to see, considering his tragic history. It was not despair-

ing or meek or plaintive, but jolly and comfortable looking, though he did blush like a girl. Emily, who always made up her mind in a twinkling, decided that "if anything had ever ailed him he had got over it, and it was n't worth while to pity him much."

By the time she returned to the sitting-room, a plain supper had been spread on the centre-table, and Hester poured a cup of weak tea, for which Emily thanked her.

"You may as well spare your breath, daughter," said Captain Howe, "she's deaf and dumb."

Emily dropped her teaspoon in amazement. Oh, yes! she understood now. There was a book-slate peeping out of Hester's pocket, and that explained what Delight called her "extraordinary powers of conversation"!

What a rogue Delight was!

"Emily, she is passing you the sugar."

"O grandma, I did n't notice. I'm afraid of looking at her; but I never take sugar."

Madam Howe smiled slightly, and Emily thought; —

"How stingy she must be to feel so glad I don't take sugar! Well, I'll eat as little as I can, but I'm awfully hungry."

"This will stop my growth," mused she, as the tea-things were removed. "I'm too small now; and if I starve myself I shall probably dry up and blow away."

"Emily," said her grandmother, interrupting these mournful reflections, "here's a Bible; we are going to read now. Come, Charles," called she, opening the kitchen door.

What "imp of the perverse" had seized Emily, that she wanted to laugh? Her grandfather's sudden sober-

ness, her grandmother's reproachful gravity, Hester's calmness, and Charles's preternatural solemnity, — oh, dear! it was quite too much for her. She fairly shook, and grandma could not help seeing it. Of course she was disgraced forever, and would be set down as a "hity-tity" girl, who made fun of everything good.

Prayers were over at last, and Emily was shown to the second-best chamber, over the restless lilacs. How lonesome the bed looked without little Dunie in it! How empty her arms felt!

"Dunie will miss 'Little Girl,'" thought she.

"Little Girl" was what Dunie always called Emily, — never anything else. "Oh! I did n't want to come here, and it's worse than I expected; but I sha' n't live long, and that's one comfort.

"What dreadful words!" said she, suddenly checking herself. "God knows I don't mean them. I shall see Delight Sanborn to-morrow, and then I shall feel better. She said we'd meet somehow, 'if it was on broomsticks in the air'; and I have an idea that when I'm with Delight I never can be homesick."

CHAPTER III.

CHARLES AND HESTER.

"Get thy spindle and thy distaff ready, and God will send the flax."

WHEN Emily awoke next morning grandma's "wet drouth" was still raging fiercely. Over to the south she could see a burying-ground soaking wet, and in the distance across the river another, and still another, for Quinnebasset ran to graveyards as naturally as the sparks fly upward.

"How cheerful!" she thought. "And the landscape is so charming, half mud, half snow. Makes me think of an old patchwork quilt, with the cotton sticking out."

She saw now, for the first time, that her grandfather's house was a white one, modestly retreating behind a clump of trees, with quite a love-in-a-cottage air. She pattered along to the front chamber, and took another observation.

There was a yard before the house, and a straight gravel-path paved with pebbles. At the front door, which faced the south, lay a granite stone, with a scraper like an inverted chopping-knife; and on either side of the door-stone stood a scrubby bush of southernwood.

At the east a field ; at the west, as Emily could see from her own chamber, the garden, with flower-beds of all sorts and sizes, probably full of old-fashioned perennial roots, eager to come to life again.

Behind these a desert of rough ground, not yet ploughed for the vegetables. Beside her own window the two scratchy lilac-bushes, which had tapped so last night. Farther along, by the kitchen door, a cinnamon rose-bush rocked in the wind ; and near it — alas ! that it must be told — a disgraceful bunch of “ bouncing Bet.”

There was a barn behind the vegetable garden, and Emily could see an old-fashioned red cow in the door, and a few old-fashioned speckled hens. No “ Jersey stock ” or “ Seabright fowls ” for grandpa ; he was not the man to put faith in anything that had not grown up with him from childhood.

Such was the pleasant, dull old place our little girl had dropped into.

“ Life, my dear, is what you make it,
And this world is as you take it.”

What was Emily going to make of her life, and how was she going to take the world at Quinnebasset?

We will see.

“ What time are you in the habit of getting up at your house ? ” asked grandma, as the young girl tripped gayly down stairs. “ We ’ ve been to breakfast half an hour ago.”

The day had begun poorly, and it held its own, — a very “ rascal of a day,” as Captain Howe called it. Emily and Delight did not meet, either “ on broomsticks

in the air" or otherwise, and Emily wandered about the house, fighting with tears. Fortunately, there were a good many things to look at, — a cabinet of Indian curiosities, china dishes two hundred years old, and plenty of quaint silver; for each of Captain Howe's wives had been an only daughter, and inherited family relics. And over and above all was the attic, called the "garret," where looms and spinning-wheels held an eternal Quaker meeting under the eaves.

Grandpa told stories the first day, before his rheumatism began to make him cross. The second day he had "talked all out," but the rain was pouring as heartily as ever. That evening he dozed over his paper, while grandma dozed over her knitting; and Emily, tired of the silence, ran out to the kitchen. Charles and Hester were sitting by the little stand, he studying, she crocheting, but they both looked up and smiled at sight of the visitor, and Hester offered her a chair.

"O Carl! they do look so funny in the other room, taking *naplets* in their chairs, and pretending to be awake. But it is n't very sociable, and I thought I'd come out here and talk to Hester. Won't it disturb you about your studying?"

"No, not a bit. I'm real glad you came," replied Charles heartily, for he had found out by this time that Emily was not a girl to be afraid of. "But what makes you call me Carl?"

"Because Delight Sanborn called you so. She says you came from Dutchland," said Emily; adding to herself, "And I'll warrant she would n't speak to you; but I shall."

"Well, I wish I was back in Dutchland then. Hang

it, I can't get such smashing lessons, and I won't try!"

"That's too bad! Your teacher must be a goose."

"Teacher! I never went to school but ten weeks in my life, and that's what's the matter! Sixteen years old, too!"

"Why, Carl!"

"And don't know so much as a child six years old. I tell you it sort of makes a fellow wish he was dead!" said Charles, slapping his books together with a bang.

He had not meant to break out in this way, had never done so before, and was ashamed of it next minute; but his heart was full to bursting, and Emily was the first one who had spoken kindly to him for the day.

"I would n't mind it," said she, soothingly; "you can't expect to know much if you never went to school but ten weeks."

"Ten weeks and a half. Oh! I shall get along somehow. You think I'm a cry-baby, don't you?" said he, beginning to whistle.

Emily saw he was afraid of being pitied, and was wise enough to drop the subject.

"Wonder if Hester will lend me her ears," said she, plunging into the woman's pocket after her slate. "Girls do need somebody to talk to," wrote she. "I suppose you want to work; but please may I ask you one question: How long have you been deaf, and how can you look so patient, you poor, dear soul?"

"I fell from a ladder when I was five years old, Miss Emily," wrote Mrs. Fogg, with fearful rapidity.

"I'll tell you my history once for all, if you like:

"I was born in Bangor, and left an orphan at the

age of six. Your grandmother's brother, a distant relative of mine, sent me to an asylum for the deaf and dumb in Boston, and there I learned to talk by signs. When quite young I married a deaf-mute, but he did not live a year, and now I'm a poor widow, trying to be thankful I can earn my living by working in your grandmother's kitchen."

"And she's your relative! Oh, I hate aristocracy!" blazed Emily. "And to think you should get hurt so when you were a baby! I don't see the object of it."

"Perhaps I needed it for discipline."

"Why? Were you a naughty baby? What is discipline? Seems to me when folks don't do anything wrong they get punished for it, and then it's called discipline."

Mrs. Fogg laughed.

"I should n't think you'd like it here with grandma, but I suppose that's another discipline."

"Oh, she's a good woman enough in her way."

"That's what they always say about disagreeable people, Mrs. Fogg. But you ought not to be anybody's servant; you're too well educated."

"Ain't you a little apt to jump at conclusions, Miss Emily? I left school when I was very young, and I am *not* very well educated. Kitchen work is all there is left for me; so don't say another word, for I *want* to be reconciled to my lot," said patient Hester, her face clouding.

The quick tears sprang to Emily's eyes. "I wish I could say something pleasant to you, — something to make you feel better, Mrs. Fogg, but I don't know how."

"You are a dear, good little girl for that; but if

you want to make me happy, don't talk about me and my troubles; talk about yourself. You don't know what a comfort it is to have somebody speak to me. Are you having a good time here, and how do you like Quinnebasset?"

"Well, I'm having a decent time, and I shall like Quinnebasset when it's done raining. I can't be homesick, because I have n't any home; our house is all torn up by the roots. But I miss my mother and my little sister—bless her little speckled face!—and the boys, and my piano. I should n't have the piano if I were at home; it's gone for a debt; but I miss it all the same. And then my grandma! I expected to love her so; but she does n't want me to—she's made of hard wood. I wish I'd broken my neck bumping round in that stage! I wish I'd never come to this house, where I'm not wanted!"

"Why, my child, what makes you think you're not wanted?"

"Oh, I'm not quite a simpleton! But there, I'm obliged to stay here. Aunt Lucy can't have me in Cambridge, and Aunt Statira can't have me in Lynn: there's nothing for me but this old Quinnebasset!"

"Then you are called to it; so I'd try to feel easy."

"Called to it? Why, we broke up because papa was in debt. I should n't think that was much of a call."

"Why not? Who is behind all these things, planning our lives for us, my dear?"

"Why, Mrs. Fogg, you look as if you knew it for a fact that I was really intended to come here."

"I do know it. As true as you live, my dear, the

Lord sent you to Quinnebasset, and there's something for you to do here that nobody else can do as well."

"Oh, what is it? I want to begin it this very minute. Perhaps one thing is to be company for you, Mrs. Fogg."

"Bless your little heart, who knows? Anyway, the sight of your bright face has done me good from the first moment you came."

"The sight of my bright face!" thought Emily in amazement. It was the first time it had ever occurred to her that she was of the least consequence in the world.

"Yes; you're the happiest looking girl I ever saw, and it's a comfort to have you 'round."

"Happy looking when I have the blues!" said Emily, still more surprised.

Girls of her age have one advantage, or ought to have it. They are only half conscious of being observed. They like to watch other people, as children peep at a party through the crack of a door, and are just as secure of not being seen.

"Don't go yet," said Charles, as Emily was rising. "I'll crack some walnuts, if you'll wait."

She waited gladly.

"Oh, this is nice fun, and I'm glad I came," said she, sitting with her little feet on the stove-hearth, and picking out walnut-meats with a pin. "Why, Carl, they're every one saddle-bags. You're a champion cracker."

"I'm good for something, then," returned he, pounding away vigorously.

"Carl, do you think I'm going to like it here in this village? Do you like it?"

"Well, some I do, and a good deal I don't."

"What do you like?"

"I like your grandfather for one thing. He's rather quick-tempered, but he's the best friend I've had yet, except Mr. Hinsdale, the minister."

"Well, what don't you like?"

"I don't like Mrs. Hinsdale. She has a lot of us big fellows in her Sunday-school class, and we can't stoop to pick up a pin but she says, 'Remember, it is the ho-ly Sabbath day!'"

"I'm glad," laughed Emily, "that she has boys, so I sha' n't be put in her class. I sha' n't ask you whether you like grandma or not, for it wouldn't be a very dignified question, considering everything."

"Do you want to be dignified?"

"Indeed I do, but it is perfectly impossible. You see, in the first place, I am very young of my age, and then wearing my hair curled is a great drawback. Oh, it's of no use for *me* to try to be dignified!"

"Glad of it," returned Charles, quite amused. "There are a great many attempts at that sort of thing here in this town."

"Who, for instance? Don't you say Delight Sanborn, or I sha' n't like it."

"Oh, Delight is n't half so proud as Dora Topliff. You must look out or Miss Dora won't call on you if she hears you speak to a boy that works for a living."

"It is n't of the least consequence whether she calls on me or not," said Emily, with supreme indifference. "I should n't wonder, Carl, if I could help you in your arithmetic. I've been to school ever since I was born, and I should be so glad if I *could* do you a little good."

"Thank you. That's up-and-down kind of you now," said Charles; refraining with difficulty from adding, "You're a brick!"

"I want to tell you how it is," he went on, trying to speak with cool unconcern as he spread open his books before her. "I've been knocked 'round considerable, from the time I was a pretty small boy, but I don't want to give it up so. Maybe I've got as much brains as the rest of the fellows, if I could only get a start."

"Grandpa says you have 'extra good parts,'" said Emily, thinking it would do the poor boy no harm to give him a compliment.

"Did he? Well, that can't be true," returned Charles, trying not to show how delighted he was. "But my father was an educated man, and that's one reason why I can't be willing to be an old stick-in-the-mud."

"Is your father dead?"

"Why, of course he is, or I should n't be here. He died before I can remember, and my mother — she was a poor little feeble thing, not much bigger than you are — went off up to the 'Forks,' and tried to keep a boarding-house, but after a while *she* broke down and died. Oh, well," added Charles, preparing to whistle, "I'd rather have had a home, and been brought up *like* folks, but you can't have all your *druthers*. Hope you won't set me down for a regular ninny because I whined so when you first came into the room."

"No, you did n't whine, and I should n't blame you if you did; and I'm determined —"

"Emily, come here!" called grandma, from the sitting-room door.

"Yes'm. Carl, you've —"

"Oh! I forgot to tell you I'm not a Dutchman."

"Well, *Charles*, then; you've had a very hard time, and I pity you almost as much as I do Hester. Don't you be discouraged, and I'll come out to-morrow night, and help you with your lessons."

And without waiting for a word of thanks, Emily ran to her grandmother.

"I'm really surprised at you, child," said Madam Howe, with cold displeasure. "Don't you know it's no place for you out in the kitchen?"

Emily dropped her eyes, but not meekly; it was to hide their flashing.

"Fiddle-de-dee!" said grandpa. "I was brought up in the kitchen when I was a youngster, but my wife comes of a family a notch beyond mine. I suppose you've noticed that, Emily!"

The young girl was speechless from indignation.

"I'll write my mother just what I've done," thought she, "and she'll tell me to do it again. I'm glad I've got a mother with a great, broad soul. *Don't* I hate aristocracy!"